

and the proceedings of Puritan *classes* in the sixteenth century show that the conception of a rule of life, to be enforced by the pressure of the common conscience, and in the last resort by spiritual penalties, was a vital part of their system. When, at the beginning of Elizabeth's reign, the sectaries in London described their objects as not merely the "free and pure" preaching of the Gospel, nor the pure ministration of the sacraments, but "to have, not the fylthye cannon lawe, but disciplyne onelye and altogether agreeable to the same heavenlye and Allmightye word of our good Lorde Jesus Chryste/'<sup>M</sup> the antithesis suggests that something more than verbal instruction is intended. Bancroft noted that it was the practice, when a sin was committed by one of the faithful, for the elders to apply first admonishment and then excommunication. The minute-book of one of the few *classes* whose records survive confirms his statement.<sup>87</sup>

All this early movement had almost flickered out before the end of the sixteenth century. But the conception lay at the very root of Presbyterianism, and it re-emerged in the system of church government which the supercilious Scotch Commissioners at the Westminster Assembly steered to inconclusive victory, between Erastians on the right and Independents on the left. The destruction of the Court of High Commission, of the temporal

jurisdiction of all persons in Holy Orders,  
and finally,  
with the abolition of episcopacy, of the  
ecclesiastical  
courts themselves, left a vacuum. " Mr.  
Henderson,"  
wrote the insufferable Baillie, " has ready  
now a short  
treatise, much called for, of our church  
discipline."  
In June 1646 an unenthusiastic Parliament  
accepted  
the ordinance which, after a three years'  
debate of  
intolerable tedium, emerged from the  
Assembly's Com-  
mittee on the Discipline and Government of  
the Church,  
and which provided for the suspension by  
the elders  
of persons guilty of scandalous offences.  
Detested by  
the Independents, and cold-shouldered by  
Parliament,